

N U M B E R F I V E

Missionary Episodes

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Ngulhao

A Story of the Great War

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“Several thousand natives in France from tribes in the Naga Hills and Garo Hills of Assam . . . two thousand Nagas there . . . rendering an important service behind the lines of our fighting men.”

TO us who have lived among them and seen them in their savagery it seems incredible; while swift on the heels of that humanistic thought of incredibility there rushes in a whole battalion of memories jubilant with the shout, “Certainly, just as we might have expected, and there are more to follow and still more — men fearless of death who will laugh at danger, endure like heroes and die like saints, for into their mountain fastness He came and through the story told them of His

might to save, they came to accept Him as the Captain of their salvation.

I wish I knew all the story of that brave Kuki from Manipur, the first of his tribe to become a Christian. How or where he first found Christ I do not know. But never, as long as we live, will Mrs. Witter or I forget the moment when first our eyes fell on that seemingly most unpromising bit of humanity, panting with double pneumonia as he lay on the hard chang (bamboo bed) in that cheerless quarter of the old "student lines" of the Jorhat Christian Schools. It was our first Sabbath afternoon after arriving at Jorhat in March, 1913. As the wind blew in upon the sick lad through the walls through which you could put your hands, what could you do, no matter how filthy the boy might be, and how alive with vermin or how near the great change, but have him quickly removed to the bungalow and placed in the room next your own sleeping room with an open door between? What had dirt or vermin to do with the question? Did not the Master always without exception "lay His hand" on every leper whom He healed! Is it not enough that "the disciple be as his Master!"

A native physician was called, and a house boy to watch the patient at night, give him his medicine regularly and report if necessary. We who could hear the breathing in the adjoining room slept with one eye open and ears alert as the wrestling with the "last enemy" pro-

ceeded through weary days and nights.

"The prayer of faith" and joyful ministry were rewarded. The boy was at last able to return to the cheerless "Boys' lines" and in time to resume his studies one by one. We learned that he spent some time in the Boys' School at Kohima, and, being of a specially religious nature, had been advised by Dr. Rivenburg to come to the Jorhat Christian Schools and give himself especially to the studies best suited to prepare him to preach to his own tribesmen the Gospel which he had come to know and love with a passion rarely equaled in a convert so young. To us was granted the privilege of giving special attention to the religious training of this strange lad, strange in looks and actions, but with a light in his face which one could not mistake. He was a lad with a vision, yes with visions, to be wonderfully realized.

Day after day as we sat together he would say, "Sahib, I saw Jesus last night and He said, 'Ngulhao, you must go, go and tell the thousands of your people that I can save them.' Sahib, when he would say that, I could see my tribesmen, thousands of them all in the dark about me, listening eagerly to me as I told them of Jesus. O Sahib, I must go, I must go." Then I told the boy, that while the Master was anxious for him to go and tell his people of the wonderful things He could do for them, any call from Jesus for service involves also a call to prepare for service, and that

I felt sure Jesus would wish him to remain still longer at Jorhat so he could give more intelligently the Gospel message to his people. This comforted him for the time being, but usually only a few days would pass before he would tell me that Jesus was again urging him to hasten to his people in the far away mountains.

At last he could endure the pressure upon his spirit no longer, and off he went. Several friends attached themselves to him, but at once their lives were put in such peril that they had to hide in the jungle for several days without food, knowing that if they were caught by those enraged at the thought of the hated new religion being introduced among them, their heads would be displayed as trophies, while fiendish shouts re-echoing through the mountains would proclaim the bloody victory.

In due time Ngulhao returned to Jorhat, saddened at the attitude of his fellow villagers, but with his zeal increased. He implored the prayers of his fellow students and the missionaries for his people. We can never forget the intensity of those pleadings. Soon three Kuki men came to Jorhat, a distance of 150 miles to ask Ngulhao to return with them and preach. Having been tried in the fire and found faithful and fearless, at his next entry he found savage ears anointed and savage hearts open to receive the message. Converts in large numbers were won, and in Manipur and in Kohima, places far distant

from their own mountain fastnesses, they were gathered for baptism by the missionaries and native pastors.

All the time Ngulhao was composing hymns in Kuki. By the summer of 1916, he had two hundred hymns ready for publication, besides having bands of young Christian men and women trained to go about from village to village singing the Gospel story and proclaiming with their lips and shining faces the power of that Gospel to transform the savage heart and make men new and gloriously happy.

Then came the War, and the Government of India was asked to send thousands of the Hill men of Assam to the war fronts in France to work behind the trenches. Missionary William Pettigrew was asked to assist in recruiting two thousand, and went to the hills, glad to help in any way possible in this war for the supremacy of righteousness and world-brotherhood. He called Ngulhao to his camp and explained to him and another young Kuki evangelist what is involved in this world war. No sooner was the situation grasped by these young men than both offered themselves for the trenches in France, and told the missionary they would see that Government had its full quota from the Kuki tribe. They hastened back to their fellow tribesmen, and soon returned with sixty young Christians who volunteered to go wherever the Government wished. The evangelists returned again to rally the full quota

from among the still non-Christian men of Kuki land. Soon these and other tribes started on their long journey to Calcutta, across India and on to France, to their tasks on the battlefields where they brave the perils of war and meet death, if need be. Those who go over the top trained to manipulate weapons of warfare are no more essential to the winning of the war than the weaponless but sturdy arms and muscular limbs and backs of those dark skinned brothers from far away Assam.

Ngulhao has left in the Kuki Hills a wife and baby boy. May he be returned in time to win thousands of his tribesmen to Christ.

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